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ABSTRACT

Some of the problems of acquisition of pragmatic competence in speech experience by language learners are examined, and the implications of selected literature in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and social psychology for enhancing pragmatic competence through second language instruction are discussed. Of special concern are the development of perceptual and interpretive strategies for elements of context and socio-psychological variables operating in the second language/second culture environment during a speech act or speech event. The ways in which learners are said to make inferences about indirect speech acts during conversation, often in the absence of relevant cultural background knowledge, are examined. Suggestions for providing classroom experiences to augment students' skill at arriving accurately at speaker intentions during natural, spoken discourse are drawn from the literature. (MSE)

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OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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TEACHING TO ENHANCE ACQUISITION OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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This paper will examine some of the problems of acquisition of pragmatic competence in speech experience by language learners and what selected literature in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and social psychology implies that L2 teachers can do to enhance its development in the learner. Of special concern will be the development of perceptual and interpretive strategies for elements of context and socio-psychological variables operating in the second language/second culture environment during a speech act or speech event. The ways in which learners are said to make inferences about indirect speech acts during conversation, often in the absence of relevant cultural background knowledge, will be examined. Implications for pedagogy will be drawn from the literature which may aid teachers in providing classroom experiences which could augment students' skill in correctly arriving at speaker intentions during natural, spoken discourse.

Rintell (1979:104) has observed that "once an L2 learner is exposed to a second culture (or culture where the target language is spoken natively, hereafter referred to as C2) he or she rapidly begins to acquire pragmatic competence." Considering the cultural and linguistic relevance of pragmatic norms and the regional, ethnic, political, and class differences of pragmatic language use within even one society or speech community (Hall 1976), the rapidity with which many L2 learners acquire the ability to "effectively" use the L2 within a range of social contexts, would indeed seem remarkable. Nevertheless, the literature has reported cases of L2 learners living in the C2 who fall prey to serious social and psychological problems due largely to a lack of understanding of the social and interpersonal uses and effects of L2 speech (see Graham 1983; Morrison & Bellack 1981; Marcum 1985). Furthermore, reports of adults arriving in the C2 already fluent in the L2 and never attaining a high degree of pragmatic competence (even though they would like to) (Gumperz 1982; Thomas 1983) would lead us to believe that the acquisition of pragmatic competence by L2 learners who must function within the C2 is, most often, not rapid enough. Pragmatic competence is not a natural outgrowth of grammatical competence, C2 contact, or functional-notional syllabi. However, pragmatic competence does appear to be related to overall ability in the L2 (see Carrell 1984).

The teaching of socially appropriate formulaic expressions in the L2 for given contexts such as "dining out" (in various kinds of restaurants, or situations in person's homes) is relevant in that it gives learners with low L2 proficiency basic, functional ability in the C2. This sort of "functional-notional" teaching, however, does not, in my mind, constitute an adequate means to aid the L2 learner in acquiring pragmatic competence.

The ability to quickly and appropriately draw inferences from L2 surface structure and C2 contextual cues during ongoing, spoken

discourse means an L2 learner's social (and sometimes psychological) survival. However, even learners who have long experienced the benefit of the aforementioned may differ significantly from native L2, C2 individuals in what they perceive as meaningful discourse cues. Accordingly, learners may vary in their assumptions about what information is to be conveyed, their understanding about how it is to be ordered and put into words, and their ability to fill in the un verbalized information needed to make sense of the ongoing action during a communicative interaction (Gumperz 1982:173). This may lead to misunderstandings, the exact origins of which go unnoticed in the course of the interaction; or, it may lead to direct miscommunication and misinterpretation of contextual cues (e.g., prosodic, kinesic, and proxemic accompaniments of participants' speech behavior). Ultimately, misjudgement of speaker's or hearer's intent, or pragmatic failure will ensue (Gumperz 1982; Argyle 1967; Argyle, Furnham, & Graham 1981).

For example, in receiving the utterance, "Would you like another drink?" the learner must be able to interpret (1) the C2 situational context and (2) the speaker's illocutionary forces, as shown in his/her intonation and other nonverbal cues, if the learner is to appropriately infer if the "question" was:

- (1) a genuine offer (an offer to provide the addressee another drink in that particular time and place.)
- (2) an indirect directive: command (i.e. "I want for you, the addressee, to leave now")
- (3) an indirective directive: suggestion (i.e. "The bar is closing, so let's go over to my place for another alcoholic beverage and whatever else might follow in that setting".)

Goffman (1974) hypothesizes that any utterance can be understood in numerous ways and that people make decisions about how to interpret a given utterance based on their definitions of what is happening at the time of the interaction; i.e., they define the interaction unfolding in terms of a frame or schema that is identifiable or familiar. One may infer, then, that L2 learners lacking appropriate C2 background knowledge may automatically rely on their own C1 schemata for the social situation at hand (e.g., knowledge about end-means or actor-goal relationships), and C1 interpretive strategies for their interpretations of the language and contextual cues received from the native L2C2 speaker during the interaction. If we consider that probably no more than 30 to 35 percent of the social meaning of a conversation of an interaction is carried by the words (Birdwhistle 1970:158) and that structural analyses of events of interpretive schemata have furnished proof that interpretation as well as social and linguistic rules for sentence use and meaning, are inextricably context-bound (Gumperz, 1982; Bates 1981), and, that rules for usage and non verbal behavior are culturally relative, then a viable means of teaching to enhance the acquisition of L2C2 pragmatic competence may lie in sensitizing learners to socio-cultural (C2) meanings of speaker and situational contextual. Then what would be needed is a perception-oriented

teaching mode combined with relevant classroom practice, i.e., one in which the behavioral objectives would seek to:

- 1) make learners aware that L2 utterances in context often say much more than they literally mean.
- 2) make learners explicitly aware of the various levels of context operating in the environment during any instance of spoken discourse and relevant C2 contextual cues.
- 3) encourage learners to consciously monitor the "cross-cultural context" (see Hall 1976) and the "given context" (see Van Dijk 1977) of the social environment in which the interaction takes place in order to perceive relevant C2 cues.
- 4) aid learners in acquiring the ability to assess the C2 contextual cues, to draw appropriate inferences as to speakers' intentions, and to respond without succumbing to
a) "pragmalinguistic failure" (assigning L1C1 force (motives) to utterances; or inappropriately transferring speech-act strategies from L1 to L2). Or,
b) "Sociopragmatic failure" (perceiving and interpreting L2C2 behavior through a C1 set of social conditions placed on language use (see Thomas 1983).

The two "types" of context mentioned in (3) above require further elaboration. What I shall call "cross-cultural context" refers to differences in cross-cultural pragmatic expectation concerning: the appropriate amount of given/new information (see Carrell 1984); distinctions between direct versus indirect speech acts; and implied versus predisposed or inherent information coded within an utterance (see Kasper 1984). Learners should be made aware that the L2 makes these distinctions, just as their L1 does, but perhaps not in the same way. Hall (1976:82) has identified a "culture continuum" on which he distinguishes between cultures according to the amount of contexting necessary to carry out activities in daily life. (HC), or "high-context cultures" are characterized by use of messages in which most of the information is either in the physical context, or internalized in the person, while very little information is in the coded, transmitted part of the message. (LC), or "low-context cultures" are just the opposite (i.e., they carry most of the information in the explicit code or language itself).

American culture, Hall claims, like many Western cultures, is at the lower end of this culture continuum, whereas Eastern cultures are primarily at the higher end. The distinction becomes especially important if speech participants are of cultures from differing ends of the continuum and if each speaker uses his or her habitual amount of "contexting" during a conversation. The LC (e.g., American) recipient may find the HC (e.g., Asian) speaker's message so vague, general, and abstract that it is incomprehensible. Consequently, the (LC) recipient's attempts to inference will most likely not reflect the intended illocutionary force. In the situation's reverse the (HC) recipient may feel that the (LC) speaker is talking down to him

or her, providing much more information that he or she needs (or wants) to know.

The second type of context, the "given context" of the social situation, is perhaps best discussed in relation to Van Dijk's (1977) context model for pragmatic analysis. According to Van Dijk, analysis of the "given context" is the most important step in pragmatic comprehension (Van Dijk 1977:217). Van Dijk uses a "topdown processing" analysis to arrive appropriately at the speaker's intentions through the identification of the following:

- 1) the general social context (formal versus informal; public versus private)
- 2) the specific social situation context (e.g., opening a formal meeting; introducing someone at a party)
- 3) the relevant factors in the given context (e.g., the participants' positions (roles, status, etc.), properties (age, sex, etc.), relations (dominance, authority), and functions (judge, waitress, peer, etc.)
- 4) the conventions (social norms) pertaining to the given context, even though these may not be easily defined.
- 5) the overall ongoing action and the sequence of acts preceding the speech act under comprehension. This level would include the relevant nonverbal accompaniments of participants' speech (contextual cues) as prosodics, kinesics, etc.

The knowledge frames activated in each of the phases above allow hearers to generate increasingly more specific expectations as to the meaning of an incoming utterance or speech act. The outcome of the last phase is where the recipient matches the incoming contextual and linguistic cues against a speech act frame (see Kasper 1984).

An exploratory study by Kasper (1984) demonstrated empirically how L2 learners experience difficulty in comprehending indirect speech acts and phatic remarks. Her findings imply the importance of L2 learners becoming sensitized to C2 contextual cues which determine a communicative social interaction, according to the above variables identified by Van Dijk. Responsible for her L2 learner/subjects' pragmatic failures were the following inadequacies in L2/C2 situation processing:

- 1) failure to make use of illocution-indicating devices (e.g. syntactic, contextual and situational cues).
- 2) problems in activating frames relevant in the given context:
- 3) too little flexibility for frame shift if incoming data from speakers are utterances incompatible with a currently-activated, higher-order frame.

Still, exactly how speakers and hearers assign appropriate

illocutionary value to a speech act remains a topic for speculation among linguists, philosophers and ethnomethodologists. Some researchers have argued that there may be a universality in performing speech acts (especially for indirect speech acts) and for what Searle (1975) has referred to as 'speakers' inferential strategies for deriving illocutionary force.' After comparing request strategies for 14 different languages, Fraser (1978) claimed that the same basic strategies were available in each language. And Carrel (1984), [after demonstrating that ESL learners, like native English speakers, in drawing two types of inferences (presuppositions and implications) consistently better comprehended implied meaning over presupposed meaning], has suggested that "the presupposition-assertion and presupposition-implication distinction may be a psychological universal in both first and second language processing." If all of this is correct, then Fraser is probably correct in claiming that "acquiring social competence in a new language does not involve substantially new concepts concerning how language is organized and what types of devices serve what social functions, but only new social attitudes about which strategies may be used appropriately in a given context" (Fraser 1978 in Schmidt & Richards 1980:139).

Arguing for the essentiality of mutual definition of context in native speakers' choice of surface structures for their speech acts, and hearers' choices of inferences which may be appropriately drawn, sociolinguists have claimed that social variables affect the possible speaker/hearer expectations and choices during an ongoing speech event. "Where knowledge of obligations and prohibitions is shared, simple interpretation rules allow prompt understanding" (Ervin-Tripp 1976)."

The views of those who argue most often that there exist cultural contrasts in pragmatic uses of speech and the views of those who claim the existence of speech act universals seem to hold one essential opinion in common. That is, that comprehension and performance of speech acts (whether it be in an L1 or L2) depend on culturally specific appropriateness criteria.

The obvious pedagogical implications are that L2 teachers must endeavor to teach the L2 in C2 context. Experiences must be provided which teach the norms for linguistic behavior in specific C2 contexts, which encourage the learner to focus on contextual variables and cues in operation during conversation and which exploit any universals in inferencing strategies.

The implications of considerations presented in this paper suggest that L2 learners need ample opportunities in the classroom to acquire and apply interpretive and productive context-analytical, and pragmatic skills through a variety of L2 tasks which emphasize that purpose. It is apparently still hypothetical, however, that deliberate classroom instruction and practice in contextual analysis of C2 social speech situations will increase the accessibility of pragmatic competence. Empirical studies are needed to investigate the real possibility of explicitly teaching such skills in the L2 class, and of the generalization of skills from the classroom to the

C2 environment. Furthermore, studies that quantitatively measure the rapidity of acquisition between experimental and control groups as well as any discernable long-term gains, would be profitable.

Suggestions for classroom exercises and role-play activities which seek to enhance learners' perception of, and monitoring of, contextual cues while providing an opportunity to produce "real life language," leading to enhancement of L2 pragmatic skills are listed below:

1. Exercises to Develop Perception and Monitoring.
(The exercises in this section are all original)

Exercise 1: Layers of Context.

In order to call learners' attention to relevant layers of context operating during speech interactions, students are presented with a copy of Van Dijk's (1977) context analysis model presented above and a short lecture concerning the ways in which contextual variables control and/or imbue meaning on spoken words to clarify them or give them meaning (see Goffman and Birdwhistle above). Students are next told that research shows a top-down processing of the type described above to be most productive. The efficacy of the model is indirectly demonstrated to students through the following sequence of activities:

- (1) Learners watch a short video with the sound turned off, in which C2 natives are participating in a conversation on a topic relevant to the students' lives, such as apologizing for being late or declining an invitation.
- (2) Students are asked to concentrate on the contextual aspects of the ongoing action; to identify speakers' kinesics and proxemics; and, to try to determine some of the higher order contextual aspects such as role relationships, status, topic of conversation, mood of speakers and the social situation at hand.
- (3) The whole class discusses the tape focusing on and clarifying some of learners' perceptions.
- (4) The film is played again twice, this time with the sound on, and learners are asked to evaluate their previous perceptions and make new ones if necessary.
- (5) Comparisons of each set of perceptions are made.

Exercise 2: Linguistic and Contextual Ambiguity

A. In order to demonstrate the ambiguity of lines of discourse out of context the teacher writes a subtly ambiguous but conversational line of discourse on the board, such as "Would you like another drink?" discussed above. Learners, in this case, do not have access to any contextual cues other than those readily apparent in the explicit code. Learners are next asked to write down an appropriate

L2C2 situation context in which the line of discourse might have been spoken and to supply relevant details of contextual information (1) on all the participants who might have been present and (2) on the "ongoing situation."

The teacher collects and quickly reviews a few of the students' context scripts. Acting as an L2 "informant," the teacher discusses a few of the most appropriate contexts rendered by the learners and in particular why some "contexts" were plausible and why others were not (the teacher may decline to mention names of students whose work is being discussed in order to protect learners' egos).

B. The teacher orally presents (rather than writing on the board as in A) an ambiguous sentence before the class, thereby including more contextual cues, such as intonations, kinesics and proxemics. Such a sentence might be one which provides an opportunity to examine contrasting stress, such as, "Alice baked John a cake?" Students, working in small groups, again hypothesize socially appropriate contexts for the utterance and its meaning. A whole class discussion can follow, after which the teacher repeats the same ambiguous sentence but employs different paralanguage (e.g. "Alice baked John a cake?"; "Alice baked John a cake?"; "Alice baked John a cake?") and kinesics in order to alter the context and meaning of the utterance. Learners repeat the exercise and discuss how and why each utterance had differing illocutionary and perlocutionary force.

C. Learners working in dyads, 1) write a "context script" for the utterance, using Van Dijk's context analysis model, and (2) improvise a short, appropriate role-play dialogue which employs the supplied utterance.

Exercise 3: Situation/Setting & Ambiguity

The teacher lines up several large photographs or pictures on the chalkboard tray, then speaks an ambiguous line of discourse. Students are asked to identify the picture which portrays the most appropriate context for the utterance, then they explain their choices. Other plausible, but less likely, choices would also be identified. The teacher may repeat this exercise several times, adding or subtracting photographs and employing various utterances.

This exercise may include two types of situation/setting ambiguity which I shall relate to Searles' (1979) concepts of (1) making words fit the world" (word-to-world-fit) and (2) making "the world fit one's words" (world-to word fit). The first type would include a rather situation bound ambiguity. In other words, a sentence would be presented in the exercise which would have as many meanings as situational contexts in which it could be appropriately employed. (e.g. the sentence "You're just in time!" might be presented with a picture of a host at a party speaking to a newly-arrived guest; a picture of an employee who has a lot of work in front of him speaking to a younger employee, and several others).

The second type could include situations and utterances where

style and formality help create the situational context, (including the relationship between the hearer and speakers and, where context dictates an utterance's syntactic form. For example, the teacher could present photographs which all involve one type of situation (e.g. one person is greeting another) and which all involve different role relationships between participants and settings. Next, the teacher would present an utterance which encodes, in an obvious way, a particular level of formality and deference (e.g. the informal greeting "Hi/what's new in your life?"). Students would most appropriately match the utterance to a picture displaying an informal situation or an encounter between peers.

Exercise 4: Direct Vs. Indirect Speech Acts: A Cultural Cloze Test

After a short discussion about the social uses of directness and indirectness in both the C2 and the learners' C1s, learners hear a tape of a short conversation between two C2 natives. The conversation should include both direct and indirect speech acts. Plausible situations might include an attempt at persuasion; a face-saving strategy and/or a rebuttal. Students listen carefully and are asked to identify speakers' utterances which appeared most direct, or indirect, to them and why. The context model presented above is introduced next. Students listen to the taped conversation again. This time they are listening for 1) contextual cues and 2) direct and indirect speech acts. With the teacher-informants' help, learners analyze and discuss the conversation until all speech and their contextual cues have been identified. The entire class should work together to "fill in" the un verbalized meanings.

An example of an appropriate scenario for this exercises taped conversation is the following:

Student "A" visits student "B" in his dormitory room and asks to borrow "B's" lecture notes. "B" agrees. The participants next exchange a few more remarks, after which "A" remarks, "wow, they sure do keep it hot in here" "B" rises, opens a window, and the conversation continues. "A" and "B" exchange a few "pre-closing" conversational remarks. Just before leaving "A" asks "B", "Hey, how about some tennis on Sunday?" "B" replies, "Sorry, I've got a test Monday" "A" responds, "Hey, well good luck on it - maybe we can play some time next week." Both participants exchange closings and "A" leaves.

II. Role-Play Activities:

Role Play 1: Applied Linguistics Approach

Fraser, Rintell, & Walters (1980:81) claim that role-play in which the learner is asked to participate with the teacher on a one-on-one basis, within a more or less structured situation, is a viable means for assessing the L2 learner's pragmatic competence. It is important to note at this point that Role-play activities should never include assignment of roles alien to learners' needs and experiences. Role-playing should include: 1) roles the learners

assume in everyday life, and 2) roles of persons whom the learners are likely to encounter in everyday life. They further argue that "intuition" and observational methods alone are inadequate for making such assessments. Their method provides useful classroom practice as well. Learners are given many particulars of a context (e.g., status of participants, urgency of message; foregrounding for the conversation, etc.) and, a social situation to enact. Each social situation is designed to elicit some particular speech act, while leaving the strategy for the performance of the act and/or the perception of and response to the speech act, up to the learner. The teacher can systematically vary certain parameters in the situation (e.g., age; sex of participant), believed to determine the speaker's choice of strategy for performing or responding to the speech act.

Role Plays 2 and 3 below are "clinical methods" derived from applied social psychology. Space limitations prevent full treatment of these methods here. Brief explanations are given and readers are referred to the sources listed for each method.

Role-Play 2: Social Skills Training

The Social Skills Training method (SST) is a highly-structured clinical method emphasizing much instruction and role-play. (SST) is commonly used by behavioral therapists to 1) teach perception and production of the "meaningful" non-verbal accompaniments of speech; 2) teach situation-appropriate language; 3) fine-tune learners' perception of speakers' moods, intentions, and reactions; 4) develop monitoring of the above; and 5) provide practice and feedback on performance of all of the above.

(SST) training manuals, which may be obtained from any university library, offer fully-detailed "lesson plans" which include analyses of social situations. Specifically, verbal and non-verbal behaviors necessary for particular social interactions are provided, along with explanations for why certain behaviors will invoke negative feedback from others. Homework assignments that encourage learners to practice and observe new social skills in the real world are included for each lesson. For more information, see Trower, Bryant, & Argyle (1978); Argyle (1979); Argyle, Furnham, & Graham (1981); L'Abate (1980).

(SST) Social Skills Training Class Outline

Clinical (SST) classes can observe the following training routine (from Trower et al, 1978)

1. Revision - Each session begins with a review of the points of the previous session, and a report from students on their successes and failures since the previous meeting (in actual L2C2 communication).
2. Description and Function of Skills to be taught - The teacher takes up a single theme such as some aspect of listening skills. The theme is then analyzed into a sequence of behavioral elements which serve as learning points which are written down and memorized. The

teacher then helps students understand how the skill sequence functions in ordinary, everyday interaction, the effect it produces on others and on the social life of the individual, and in particular, how it will help the students.

3. Demonstration - The trainer demonstrates the skill by (1) acting out a social interaction routine with a teacher's aid, or (2) by showing a video which does this.

4. Imitation - Students imitate (role-play) the skill in small groups, dyads, or one-on-one with the teacher. This can be taped.

5. Feedback - The trainer gives students feedback, including praise on the effects of their efforts. This may be done while playing the video of the students' performance. Feedback emphasizes effect rather than appearance or language errors alone.

6. Practice - From feedback comments, a few correction points are practiced in detail with continuous guidance from the teacher. Satisfactorily completed sequences are worked through again rapidly to speed up response reflexes.

7. Homework Assignments - These encourage students to put into practice the skills learned during the class session.

Role-Play 3: Sociodrama

Sociodrama offers a less-structured role play and discussion method designed to emphasize: 1) more learner practice in monitoring the contextual environment, and accurate perception of illocutionary force; 2) creativity and socio-metric choice through role-play; 3) whole-class discussion which includes reflection on pragmatic uses of language and learners' feelings about participating in various C2 contexts. A more detailed description of the method, techniques, and role-play situation suggestions may be found in Altshuler & Picon, 1980 and in Shearon, 1980.

An underlying principle of Sociodrama is sociometric choice and acting out rather than repressing frustrations and maladaptive feelings and behaviours. Touchy real-life situations are often used for this kind of role-play. Techniques include "mirroring"; "doubling"; and "role--reversal."

EXAMPLE: The teacher and teacher's aide dyad might first model or role-play a situation in which a student confronts his or her professor about a grade which the student deems unfair. In an ESL class, one teacher would play an American professor, and the other teacher (or an advanced ESL student) would play the part of the disgruntled ESL student. The scene would be played several times for the class: one time would be "the wrong way" e.g., the "ESL student" would use native Saudi Arabian paralanguage, kinesics, proxemics, and assertiveness behaviors.

The teacher playing the part of the professor would demonstrate

during the role-play, some of the unexpected or unwanted reactions which the Saudi student might receive.

The class would discuss the scene with the teachers, then watch another role-play scene, which demonstrated appropriate L2C2 language and behaviors. After further class explanation, all students would choose a partner and perform their own role-plays.

In conclusion, both L2 teacher experience and current professional literature attest to the necessity of enhancing the pragmatic development of learners in the L2 classroom by promoting understanding of C2 contextual variables and relationships.

Though most of what has been presented in this paper has to do with spoken language, similar L2 students in a C2 context would also experience difficulty in comprehending and using many of the pragmatic uses of written language. This is a topic which requires further research.

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